

Should a Minister Marry Two Unbelievers in the Church?

By James Moriello, Firm Foundation Christian Church, Woonsocket, RI, 2018

Dear Friend,

I'm honored that you value my counsel in the matter of the marriage of two unbelievers (man and wife). As indicated, I do not recommend that you, or any Christian (minister or otherwise) perform such a ceremony. The reasons are as follows.

1. Both Christ and the church are absent from such a marriage from the start. Ephesians 5:22-33.
2. The Christian believer/minister represents both Christ and the church, and compartmentalizing the Lord out in any situation is a tacit denial of Christ. Matthew 10:33. We are to glorify God in all we do, and seek to honor the Lord and His covenant of marriage, by including Him. 1 Corinthians 10:31, Genesis 2:24.
3. Within the context of the church, marriage and re-marriage is to be "only in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 7:39).
4. The marriage of believers is to be lived out within the context of the local church. The marriage of unbelievers is outside the context and purview of the local church by definition. 1 Corinthians 5:12.
5. Marriage is a covenant, and it is defined differently than the world tends to define it today. It is a permanent solemn pledge before God, not to be entered into lightly (without Him). Matthew 19:6.
6. The children of the world cannot understand the spiritual dimension to marriage. 1 Corinthians 2:14. Therefore, counsel apart from salvation will not be understood within proper context.
7. The roles within Christian marriage are biblically defined, and generally rejected by the world. Husbands are to be shepherd-leaders, and wives are to submit in love. Again, without proper affirmation and mutually agreed adherence to Ephesians 5:22-33 and 1 Corinthians 11:3 and 13:4-7, counsel would be largely moot.
8. What I would say to the argument based on 1 Corinthians 7:2 is this. With regard to believers living together (or not, but serious and committed to the other), the couple should be working toward marriage and remain celibate until such time as the covenant is entered into before God. If one or both of the partners is an unbeliever, then the relationship does not include Jesus Christ as its "glue." Ecclesiastes 4:12, John 15:5. I say, let them marry, but outside the church.

9. The position of a Christian minister that marrying two unbelievers is okay to alleviate the living in sin is a dangerous one. We don't have spiritual authority to extend God's boundaries beyond Scripture confines. "If the foundations are destroyed, What can the righteous do?" (Psalm 11:3). Further, in divorcing the covenant from the ceremony, it opens up the doors to all kinds of sanction, and this logic has even brought some to the justification of doing homosexual ceremonies.

By all means, meet with them. Use the opportunity to preach the gospel. Stress Hebrews 10:24-25, the necessity of joining oneself to God's church. And offer to pray with them and for them regularly. Be God's man. Perhaps God will work out a miracle here. But don't compromise, as this will not be of help to those you wish to minister to, but rather teach them that it is okay to circumvent God when convenient. Let them marry outside the church, and by all means attend their ceremony if you are invited.

As I said, if you follow a different path, I shall not take offense. My advise there is to make sure you can justify it. Biblically. Honestly.

Blessings and Peace,
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